

## Non-feminist women translators of the Bible: Swedish translator Viveka Heyman as a case in point

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the work of Viveka Heyman (1919-2013), the first woman to translate the Hebrew Bible into Swedish. It argues that Heyman's translation strategies were informed by a radical form of cultural relativism; as a consequence, she rejected all forms of critique of male bias and misogyny in the biblical texts, a critique that according to her was voiced from a present-day cultural context. She contended that such bias was only to be found in interpretations and translations of the biblical texts, and not in the source texts themselves. For a woman translator of the Bible, this stands out as a less common approach. The case of Viveka Heyman is thus used in this study to illustrate how women translators may translate the Bible (and other religious texts) in more ways than one, and for a number of different reasons.

### **Keywords**

Bible translation, women translators, Viveka Heyman, cultural relativism, feminist translation studies

## 1. Introduction

The literary critic, author, and translator Viveka Heyman (1919-2013) was the first woman ever to translate the Hebrew Bible into Swedish. The first translations of Hebrew Bible books into Swedish appeared already in the 14th century; in 1541, the first complete translation of the Bible into Swedish was published. Being revised several times, this translation came to dominate Sweden for several hundred years. The 20th century saw a new authorized version, published in 1917. These projects were all collaborative or collective endeavours, and none of them included women as translators. By contrast, Viveka Heyman's appearance on the stage of biblical translation did not come in the context of an official committee or as a contractor for a new authorized version; it was a wholly personal and individual project. During a period of almost forty years, she published her one-woman translations of large parts of the Hebrew Bible: Song of Songs, 1960; Qohelet, 1961; Job, 1969; Proverbs, 1970; 1-2 Samuel, 1977; Genesis, 1979; Psalms, 1981; and the Latter Prophets, 1996.

As will be explored in this paper, through her translations Viveka Heyman took positions on matters of interpretation and translation that differ from those generally expected from women translators. Such expectations were gradually formed during the wake of early Western feminist translation in the 1980s and onwards (see the discussion in section 3), leading to the articulation of specific translation strategies as well as assessments of source text features that were deemed problematic from a feminist point of view. Viveka Heyman, however, did not accept such assessments. For example, according to Heyman, the idea that the biblical texts were characterized by 'male bias' (e.g., Bird, 1988) presupposed present-day culture and society as a norm, whereby the biblical texts inevitably fell short<sup>1</sup>.

Feminist translation is arguably situated at an intersection between descriptive research and prescriptive practice. As such, it both shapes and conveys specific translational norms. As already suggested, this seems also to form and affect expectations on women translators more generally. With Viveka Heyman as a case in point, this paper aims to critically address and discuss such expectations. In other words, an important rationale for the paper is similar to that of Hassen, who seeks "to investigate the assumption that a translator's feminine gender automatically results or leads in/to a woman-centered or feminist reading of the source text" (2012, p. 3).

In this paper, I will pursue the following line of argument: feminist translation expects women translators of the Bible to use translation strategies that 'intervene' in(to) the source texts. Such an expectation is based on the assumption that the biblical source texts are marked by different forms of male bias which need to be dealt with by the translator. Viveka Heyman however did not think such conceptions applicable to the biblical texts. Her work therefore challenges assumptions which, since early feminist translation of the 1980s and 90s, have turned into a form of essentialization of women translators (i.e., women translators are ascribed certain characteristics connected to their gender). This phenomenon has perhaps been particularly noticeable when it comes to women translators of the biblical texts, simply because the Bible is often considered as the prime example of a misogynist or male biased text (e.g., Long, 2013, p. 471). Implicitly or explicitly, there seems hence to exist an expectation on women translators to perceive certain problems connected to the translation of particular texts in a specific way — precisely because they are women. However, as I will argue in what

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<sup>1</sup> Viveka Heyman's first translation of a Hebrew Bible book was published in 1960, thus decades before the feminist translation assumptions referred to were first being articulated. However, in feminist translation studies, they are frequently used to discuss historical, and not only contemporary, translation (e.g., Castro & Ergun, 2018). It should also be noted that Heyman's work was published during a long period of time, with her last full-length book in 2000.

follows, women translators may translate the Bible in a number of ways and — perhaps more importantly — for a number of reasons.

I will start the paper by introducing the work of Viveka Heyman, outlining some of her main translation strategies and her discussion of important Hebrew Bible source text features. I will mostly draw on paratextual material in the form of the introductory essays that accompanied her published translations. I introduce the concept of cultural relativism as a way of explaining Heyman's understanding of the Hebrew Bible. This will be followed by a discussion of feminist issues in biblical translation, with a view to placing Heyman in this context. Differences and similarities between Heyman's approach and some of the assumptions of feminist translation will be underlined. Next, Heyman's participation in a public discussion with non-fiction author and debater Birgitta Onsell during the 1990s, in connection to a state-funded official project to translate the Bible into Swedish, will be related. This will further highlight the deviations between Heyman's translation strategies and those of feminist translation. The extent of Heyman's cultural relativism will also be illustrated. The paper will end with a general discussion and some final conclusions.

## 2. Viveka Heyman: translation strategies and principles

Viveka Heyman was born in 1919 in Uppsala, north of Stockholm, to Jewish parents. After studying at the university in Uppsala for three years, she moved to Stockholm in 1946 to work at the syndicalist newspaper *Arbetaren* [The Worker]. During this time, Heyman became an increasingly productive literary critic. In 1948 she unexpectedly moved to the new-born state of Israel, where she lived several years. Initially, she lived at different kibbutzes, and then in Jerusalem, where she studied Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew at the Hebrew University. In 1955 she published her first translation into Swedish, a collection of Jewish short stories which was hailed by Swedish newspapers as a pioneering work, letting Swedish readers get a glimpse of modern Hebrew literature. In the same year, she also published a collection of poems. By this time, Viveka Heyman had moved back to Sweden to live in Stockholm, although she frequently traveled to Israel for the rest of her life.

In 1960, Heyman published her first translation of a Hebrew Bible book, the Song of Songs. The translated text was preceded by a lengthy preface, where Heyman (1960, pp. 5-23) outlined her views of the interpretation and translation of the text. In very harsh terms, she criticized the Swedish 'authorized version' of the time, a fairly idiomatic translation of the Bible into Swedish published in 1917. According to Heyman, this translation had downplayed the erotic language of the Song of Songs, thereby draining it of most of its original content. In her opinion, the reader of this translation could not experience what the source text had originally conveyed. Thus, in her own translation, Heyman made extensive use of erotic metaphors. In fact, the dialogues of the Song of Songs were, as she put it, "nothing else than a number of literary moulded orgasms" (p. 11)<sup>2</sup>. The translation received numerous reviews, generally praising Heyman's rendering.

Encouraged by this, Heyman immediately embarked on her next translation, of the book of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes). It was published one year later, in 1961. In the preface (pp. 5-31), Heyman for the first time showed her strong affinity with the Romantic movement and its interest in the Hebrew Bible (on this, see, e.g., Høgenhaven, 2018). Heyman insisted that the source texts, as well as the character of Qohelet himself could only be grasped through a study informed by "empathy" (*inlevande studium*, Heyman, 1961, p. 8). To understand the Bible, one needs to enter it, as it were, and apprehend the biblical texts on their own terms.

<sup>2</sup> All of Heyman's work was originally published in Swedish. When I quote Heyman here and in the following, the translations into English are my own.

This much resembles the ‘psychological interpretation’ of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics (see Schleiermacher, 1998). Related to this is the idea, put forward by Heyman in the preface, that the logic of the Hebrew Bible is radically different from Western, Aristotelian logic (Heyman, 1961, pp. 10-11). The logic of the Bible is, instead, the “logic of poetry” (p. 10). Here, Heyman quotes in an almost verbatim way the first chapter of Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Vom Geist der ebräischen Poesie* (1782-1783). According to Herder, the Biblical Hebrew language could be compared to the violently rocking waves of a stormy ocean. This is typical of the non-modest aesthetic preferences of the Romantics and their precursors, with Rousseau as one of the most important influences. In a similar way, Heyman stated that encountering the texts of the Hebrew Bible should resemble being “hit by a shock, by a thunderstorm” (1980a, p. 23). In terms of translation strategies, this brings to mind Lawrence Venuti’s notion of ‘foreignization,’ a strategy aiming to give the reader of a translated work an “alien reading experience” (2008, p. 16). Not surprisingly, in outlining his concepts of ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication,’ Venuti (2008, pp. 83-98) draws heavily on Schleiermacher and his notion of “cultural difference” (Venuti, 2008, p. 95).

One of the ideas brought forth by the Romantics was that of linguistic relativism (Leavitt, 2015), which means that language and mode of thought or world-view are closely related. As Herder put it: “A people has no idea for which it has no word” (quoted in Leavitt, 2015, p. 84). In the preface to her translation of the Book of Psalms (1981), Viveka Heyman explicitly sided with such ideas. To take one example, she stressed the fact that Biblical Hebrew lacks the grammatical category of tense. According to Heyman, this was an indication that the ancient Hebrews possessed a particular “conception of time” (*tidsbegrepp*; Heyman, 1981, p. 18). The fact that Biblical Hebrew was linguistically structured in a certain way thus determined its speakers’ mode of thought. The Biblical Hebrew verbal system hence indicated a specific ‘Hebrew thinking’ (cf. Koch, 1991, pp. 3-24).

This kind of linguistic relativism put forward by Heyman may be seen as a specific instance of the broader concept of cultural relativism (Brown, 2008; Donnelly, 1984; on the concept of relativism, see Hales 2011). Cultural relativism stresses the (partial) incommensurability between different cultures, which is connected to variances of world-view or mode of thought. Thus, world-views may not be explained as outcomes of universal (e.g., biological) factors. By this follows that there are “no universal criteria for adjudicating between differing world-views” (Baghramian & Carter, 2020, §4.1[b]). Viveka Heyman’s attempt to study, interpret, and translate the biblical texts ‘on their own terms’ thus resembles the position of the anthropologist Franz Boas, the founding father of modern anthropology and a strong proponent of cultural relativism, who “unremittingly preached [to his students] the necessity of seeing the native from within” (Robert Lowie, qtd. in Brown 2008, p. 364 n. 3, addition mine). This could also be a neat summary of Viveka Heyman’s conception of how to study the Hebrew Bible: it has to be approached from within.

In the following section, I identify a few important aspects of feminist translation, eventually narrowing down the discussion to issues of biblical translation. I then address how these differ from the ideas voiced by Heyman.

### 3. Heyman’s strategies versus feminist translation approaches

Many Bible scholars and translators agree that the language of the Bible is the “product of patriarchal society and serves to perpetuate androcentric perspectives” (Bird, 1988, p. 95 n. 1). Feminist translators of the Bible and other religious texts have over time discussed and conceptualized different strategies for dealing with this kind of male bias (e.g., Simon, 1996, pp. 111-133; Von Flotow, 1997, pp. 52-57). In what follows, I review some of the main notions

which feminist (Bible) translation has highlighted, to prepare the ground for my discussion of the strategies used by Viveka Heyman and assess how they differ from those generally implemented by feminist translators.

The first thing that should be noted is that ‘feminist translation’ is not, of course, a unitary concept. It naturally encompasses a number of different standpoints. Nevertheless, a few prominent features can be singled out. I will very briefly discuss the following terms, which can be characterized as different but interconnected approaches to the task of translation: intervention, re-writing/meaning production, and activism. They are all closely related. First, intervention is a concept that may be traced back to the Canadian school of the 1980’s (see Von Flotow, 1991); it continues to be prominent in feminist translation to this day (Castro & Ergun, 2018; Von Flotow & Kamal, 2020). Second, intervention is generally understood as a form of re-writing (Karpinski, 2015), whereby the translator becomes an active part in meaning production (Fisher, 2010). According to Simon (1996, p. 13), feminist translation therefore “foreground[s] female subjectivity in the production of meaning.” Third, as intervention not only has linguistic but also political implications, it is not uncommon to label it as a form of feminist ‘activism’ (e.g., Castro & Ergun, 2018). What these approaches have in common is an attempt to move beyond the idea of translation as a search for equivalence between source text and target text. In the words of Karpinski (2015), they oppose the traditional “concept of fidelity to the original” (p. 23; see also, e.g., Vander Stichele 2002; Arrojo 1994; on the sexist connotations of the terms ‘fidelity’ or ‘faithfulness,’ see Chamberlain’s 1988 seminal paper).

What the approaches discussed above have in common is that they are grounded in an attempt to foreground women translators and their experience. The way these approaches were first articulated, as well as the context in which this took place, entail that women translators in many cases have continued to be associated with them. Occasionally, this also works backwards in time, as it were. A striking example is how Castro & Ergun (2018), in an attempt to focus on examples of ‘feminist’ translation before the Canadian school, discuss several 17th- and 18th-century women translators; their work is gathered under the umbrella term “feminist intervention” (p. 127). The work of these women translators is thus interpreted in terms of feminist translation approaches or strategies outlined in the 1980s and early 90s, in a specific linguistic and cultural context (Wallmach, 2006). I will return to this point in the concluding discussion.

In Bible translation, intervention strategies involving the use of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language have been increasingly common from the 1980s onwards (Strauss, 1998; Clason, 2006). The New Revised Standard Version (1989) was one of the first major translations to employ gender-neutral language; the 1996 revised “Inclusive Language Edition” of the New International Version may also be mentioned. More recently, the German *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (2007) has sparked both interest and controversy (see Köhler, 2012). Such gender-neutral and gender-inclusive translations use strategies that may indeed be termed feminist; by Nord (2002), they are explicitly connected to “feminist ideology” (pp. 110-111). This is because they aim at “remov[ing] the cultural bias” of the biblical source texts (Strauss, 1998, p. 60), which includes different forms of male bias (Von Flotow, 1997, pp. 52-53; Ellingworth, 1987). “Removing” something from the source texts clearly implies some sort of intervention strategy. Accordingly, in line with feminist translation more generally, feminist Bible translation by and large rejects the notion of linguistic or semantic ‘fidelity’ to the source texts (Vander Stichele, 2002; Pippin, 1998; Castelli, 1990; see, however, Bird, 1988).

This brings us back to the central character of this paper: Viveka Heyman. She argued that the literary and cultural features identified as problematic male bias are not, in fact, present in the biblical source texts: in her opinion, such features are exclusively the outcome of fallacies

in interpretation and translation of the source texts (Heyman, 1961, pp. 10-21, 27-31; 1980b, pp. 68-69, 82-83; 1981, pp. 14-15). Therefore, in her work, Heyman sought to correct such misinterpretations. One example is her discussion of the concept of ‘original sin,’ derived from Genesis 3. According to Heyman, this notion did not stem from the source text, but from the interpretation of the Christian fathers, notably Augustine (Heyman 1980b, p. 69). Heyman also argued that the common conception that Eve had been created subordinate to Adam (Genesis 2) was indeed the result of a fallacious interpretation. Eve was in fact created as a “companion” (*motstycke*) to Adam (Heyman, 1980b, p. 69), and not as a ‘helper,’ as someone supposed to serve the man. According to Heyman, this latter idea had been implied by earlier translations. She explicitly stated that the source text was not to blame for any misogynist tendencies, but rather the Swedish ‘authorized version’ of 1917 (Heyman, 1980b, p. 87), which rendered Gen 2:18b “I will make for him a help, one that is suitable to him” (translation mine)<sup>3</sup>. In contrast to what was conveyed by this translation, Heyman’s contention was that Eve was indeed created equal to Adam.

Another example of such exegesis is to be found in Heyman’s translation of Proverbs (1970). In the introduction, Heyman stated that the depiction of women in this book marks a complementary view on their role and character in relation to men (pp. 17-18). Thus, in biblical society, women did not occupy a “marginal position” (Newsom, 1989, pp. 156-157), but a different, complementary position. In other words, if ‘patriarchy’ is defined as a hierarchical structure where one group of people (i.e., women) is subordinate to another group (i.e., men), Heyman’s contention would be that this definition is simply not applicable to the biblical source texts but, rather, the outcome of fallacious interpretation and translation.

Other translators who have criticized male bias in earlier biblical translations usually acknowledge that it exists already in the source texts (e.g., Korsak, 2002); it has since been reproduced or even strengthened in translation (see Michaud, 2020). These views thus clearly deviate from Heyman’s take that the source texts themselves do not carry with them any such bias. Heyman’s criticism of Bible translations was directed also at contemporary translations, for example the Swedish state-funded biblical translation *Bibel 2000*, a project which had started in the 1970’s and thus paralleled her own translations. Since it according to her was too idiomatic, Heyman explicitly called this translation a “distortion” of the source texts (Heyman 1980b, p. 85; for an extended discussion, see Pleijel, 2019a, pp. 127-146)<sup>4</sup>. In the following section, I discuss Heyman’s debate with the Swedish author Birgitta Onsell during the 1990s on the subject of male bias in the Bible, which sheds further light on the extent of Heyman’s cultural relativism.

#### 4. Debating Birgitta Onsell

From the second half of the 1980s, the Swedish non-fiction writer and debater Birgitta Onsell (1925-2012) wrote several popular books and essays on the Hebrew Bible, containing feminist critique of different forms of male bias in the biblical texts. When the translation project

<sup>3</sup> As noted by one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper, the Hebrew text of Gen 2:18 and 20 contains the phrase ‘ezer *knegdô*, which opens up for any translation to stress both the ‘helper’ (‘ezer) and the ‘companion’ (*knegdô*) aspect (e.g., NRSV, “I will make him a helper as his partner”). However, the wording of the 1917 Swedish translation definitely rules out this implied possibility, exclusively stressing the ‘helper’ aspect of the source text.

<sup>4</sup> While Heyman, having published her first translation of a Hebrew Bible book in 1960, was the first woman to translate parts of the Hebrew Bible into Swedish, it should be noted that several women took place in the committee that carried out this state-sponsored translation. For an account by one of these translators, see Pleijel, 1996.

*Bibel 2000*, mentioned above, was starting to come to an end in the late 1980s and early 90s, Birgitta Onsell persistently voiced her critique against this project. According to her, because of the Hebrew Bible's condescending stance towards women, the new translation should be endowed with an introduction pointing out these problematic features (e.g., Onsell, 1999). In the wake of Onsell's campaign, several members of the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) placed a bill in 1990 on this issue: since the translation project *Bibel 2000* was organized and funded by the state, the Swedish Government should instruct the translation committee to include the kind of foreword that Onsell had suggested. In 1995, a new, similar bill was put forward; it spoke of "an incomprehensible, hateful attitude to women that permeates especially older parts of the Bible" (Parliamentary motion bill nr. 1994/95: Kr408; translation mine).

Viveka Heyman vigorously opposed these initiatives. In an essay, printed in 2000, she debated Birgitta Onsell in rather harsh terms. Interestingly, Heyman began by stating that "indisputably, the Bible — from its first page to its last — is set in a patriarchal society, where man reigns" (Heyman, 2000, p. 11). However, she then explained that "when we encounter customs which differ from our customs, we must not assume that they are inferior compared to ours, simply because they are different" (p. 12). Thus, on the one hand, Heyman acknowledged male bias in the biblical texts, but on the other she would not criticize it as such, since doing so would have entailed imposing anachronistic standards on the biblical texts. It thus seems plausible to suggest that Heyman would not have agreed with the normative or prescriptive statements that inform much of feminist scholarship on the Bible, including feminist translations of the holy scripture (cf. above, section 3). For example, Bird's (1988) definition of sexist language in the Bible as "language that employs masculine terms and images *inappropriately* to describe human and divine reality" (p. 95 n. 1; emphasis mine) is a normative statement that Heyman most likely would not have agreed on, simply because she did not share the basic premise that features of the biblical source texts could be described as "inappropriate."

As a consequence, such criticisms were called into question by Heyman and discussed by her in connection to a number of specific biblical texts, in order to show that these texts had been erroneously interpreted as misogynist. Heyman's interpretation of Genesis 2, arguing that Eve was a companion (and not a helper) to Adam, has already been mentioned. Another example discussed by Heyman is how women were considered impure after having given birth (Leviticus 12). According to Heyman, this was not because of any denegrating stance towards women or their' bodies, but purely a matter of culturally conditioned fear of blood, which was assumed to hold a person's 'soul' (*nephesh*) (Heyman, 2000, p. 13; cf. Pleijel, 2019b, pp. 162-163). Another case, put forward by Birgitta Onsell as an example of misogyny in the Hebrew Bible, was the prophet Nahum calling the city of Nineveh a prostitute or whore (Nah 3:4). According to Heyman (2000), this was not because Nahum despised women, but simply because the grammatical gender of the noun 'city' (*'iyar*) is feminine in Hebrew (p. 21). Thus, Heyman implied that, had 'city' been grammatically masculine, Nahum would instead have chosen a male metaphor.

Whether or not one agrees with Heyman's exegesis of these texts, the interpretations put forward appear to make sense. However, other examples show a more controversial exegesis, for example when Heyman discusses the assumed rapes of, respectively, Tamar and Dinah (2 Samuel 13; Genesis 34) (Heyman, 2000, pp. 16-19). Her line of argument is that if one knows enough about the cultural background, the general opinion that Genesis 34 chronicles how Dinah is raped must be revised. Heyman refers to a stipulation in Deut 22:28-29, according to which a man must marry a woman if he has had sexual intercourse with her. According to Heyman, Dinah and Sechem loved each other and wanted to get married, which is why they had sexual intercourse in the first place: to force their parents to let them marry. Unlikely as

this seems, the interpretation stands out as even more unlikely in light of the story's ending, where Dinah's brothers say to their father, "should our sister be treated like a whore?" (New Revised Standard Version)<sup>5</sup>. As for Tamar and Amnon (2 Samuel 13), Heyman attributes great importance to the bread Tamar bakes at Amnon's request. In her exegesis, Heyman introduces an object that is not even mentioned in the source text: the bread peel that Tamar supposedly uses for baking the bread. According to Heyman, Amnon fools Tamar to leave in another room the bread peel, otherwise she would have used it to knock him senseless. By this, Tamar shows that she is a "resolute girl" (*resolut flicka*; Heyman, 2000, p. 18). The actual sexual violence, however, goes unnoticed by Heyman. And as already noted, the bread peel at the center of Heyman's exegesis is not even mentioned in the biblical text. It might thus be seen as an extreme form of 'psychological interpretation' (see section 2), according to which the interpreter's ability to delve into the world of the text is sufficient for deducing this kind of information.

I would like to mention, in connection to these two examples, an instance from earlier work by Heyman for the newspaper *Arbetaren* (see Pleijel, 2019a, pp. 56-57). During the early 1970s, Swedish news media gave much prominence to the rape of a young girl by a North African sailor on leave from his ship in Stockholm. It was reported that initially the girl had consented, but then changed her mind. The sailor, however, would not accept this and went through with the intercourse. Viveka Heyman wrote about the case in *Arbetaren* and, according to her opinion, the sailor could not be condemned for having acted this way: in his culture, a woman who indicated that she wanted to have sexual intercourse could not change her mind. All in all, in Heyman's view, the girl was to blame, since she had acted in a way that did not respect the sailor's culture. Horrifying as this line of argument indeed seems, it appears as the logical consequence of a form of radical cultural relativism (see Donnelly, 1984). In other words, Heyman basically held that cultural and historic variations "are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders," as Donnelly (1984, p. 400) has it. As already suggested, a radical cultural relativism is evident also in Heyman's strategies of interpretation and translation when it comes to the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Moving on to the concluding discussion, I will seek to summarize the connections between Viveka Heyman, cultural relativism, and feminist conceptions of translation, to show how Heyman might be understood as a translator who challenges several of the assumptions that are generally made about women translators of the Bible.

I would like to first summarize Viveka Heyman's overall view on what the biblical texts represent and how they should consequently be translated. Three main points can be singled out. 1) According to Heyman, the Bible is indeed set in a patriarchal context, and it is important to acknowledge the cultural context within which the scripture emerged. 2) This, however, should not lead to criticism against features which may be perceived as male biased, since this would entail assessing the biblical texts from the perspective of present-day culture and society. In other words, even though Heyman did occasionally use the terms 'patriarchal' or 'patriarchy,' she did not give them a pejorative sense. This position is a logical consequence of Heyman's cultural relativism. 3) Accordingly, the anachronisms that according to Heyman were evident in the history of biblical exegesis and translation should be revised and corrected. With the hermeneutics of the Romantic movement as an important source of inspiration, this may only be done by 'returning' to the source texts, by assuming their standpoints, striving to adhere as closely as possible to them in translation. Thus, a translation strategy such as intervention,

<sup>5</sup> I want to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

which implies ‘altering’ the source texts or ‘adding’ to them would, according to Heyman, be untenable. At the same time, Heyman’s own translations could indeed ‘deviate’ from the source texts, linguistically speaking<sup>6</sup>. This should not be seen as an inconsistency on her part, but once again as a consequence of her affinity with the Romantic movement, resulting in the idea that fidelity to the ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) of the source text could in fact lead to ‘freer’ translation strategies (Pleijel, 2019a, pp. 214–217). Since translation according to the Romantics and their precursors meant delving into “the inner spirit of a work” (Baildam, 1999, p. 111), a translation could be idiomatic, even a paraphrase, while still being ‘true’ or ‘faithful’ to the original (for an extended discussion, see Huyssen, 1969).

If not always on a practical level, on a general level Heyman’s positions are clearly at odds with many of the central assumptions of feminist Bible translators. Her unwillingness to ‘alter’ the source texts by ‘intervening’ into them was discussed above. For the same reason, Heyman would not have agreed to gender-neutral or gender-inclusive translations. Nor would she have agreed with another position held by a minority of feminist translators or translation scholars, namely that biblical translations should in fact convey the Bible’s male bias, in order to expose it (Simon, 1996, p. 125; Bird, 1988; cf. Henitiuk, 2019, p. 440; for a discussion of this position with respect to Qur’an translation, see Hassen, 2011, p. 222). The reason Heyman would have rejected these positions is that they are voiced from a perspective that, according to her, does not acknowledge the cultural and linguistic contingency of the biblical texts; they seek to expose ‘male bias’ as deeply problematic, and not simply as a feature among others of the biblical texts. It should perhaps be noted that the kind of far-reaching cultural relativism demonstrated in such contentions has potentially problematic implications, not least if it becomes equated or confused with moral or ethical relativism (cf. Brown, 2008; Lukes, 2008). As Vander Stichele (2002, p. 155) aptly noted,

[a] literal rendering of the text may be considered unproblematic when it concerns Homer, but not when it concerns the Bible. The reason is that the Bible is not considered just another ancient book, and its translations are not meant for private use only. Biblical texts are part and parcel of public discourse. As such, they reflect and shape people’s identity.

Needless to say, this insight has been an important rationale for feminist scholarship on the Bible, with consequences where its translation is concerned. The use of the Bible, generally as a translated text, has in different ways affected women’s lives during centuries. This is precisely why women translators, from Julia E. Smith onwards, have sought to translate the Bible in the service of women’s liberation (Cho, 2011).

But is this true for women translators of the Bible in general? This brings us back to what I have argued in this paper: that Viveka Heyman’s work is relevant to investigate as a case that highlights and, indeed, flouts many of the assumptions that feminist translators and feminist translation scholars have made about women translators. In more recent research, the essentializing tendencies of earlier feminist translation have been called into question (Castro & Ergun, 2017; Von Flotow & Farahzad, 2017; Brown, 2020). And yet, the translation strategies once associated with what is now being perceived as an essentializing understanding of women as translators are still being employed and expected when it comes to precisely

<sup>6</sup> One example is Heyman’s recurring, somewhat bizarre tendency to include literary motifs and concepts from the Icelandic sagas in her Hebrew Bible translations (Pleijel, 2019a, pp. 217–220). In the introduction to her translation of Samuel (Heyman, 1977, pp. 38–39), she suggested that the Old Norse language of the Icelandic sagas shared an affinity with the Biblical Hebrew language. This affinity, however, went deeper than the surface structure of the respective languages: the Hebrews and the medieval Icelanders shared the same ‘primitive’ mode of thought (cf. Pleijel, 2019a, p. 93), and the linguistic utterances that were an expression of these modes of thought were thus essentially equivalent. They shared the same *Geist*, as it were.

women translators. In other words, translation strategies first articulated in the context of the 1980s and early 90s feminist translation, exclusively dealing with women translators, continue to be associated with feminist translation, and *thus* with women translators. Arguably, such essentializing understanding is an outcome of the second wave-feminism context of early feminist translation (see Von Flotow, 1991). However, informed by a radical form of cultural relativism, and thus refusing the kind of universal standards commonly associated with second wave feminism, Viveka Heyman in fact seems to have had more in common with third wave feminists, stressing the cultural, linguistic and historical contingency of experience (Snyder, 2008; on feminism and cultural relativism, see Brems, 1997).

Taking Viveka Heyman as a case in point, I have suggested in this paper that women translators of the Bible may perceive issues of translation in a number of different ways. This regards specific translation strategies or approaches, as well as more fundamental ideas on what the biblical source texts represent, and how they should be understood. All in all, Viveka Heyman can thus perhaps best be described as a non-feminist translator of the Bible — not because she renounced feminism as such or as a political project, but because she did not consider it applicable to the biblical texts. Paradoxically, this is why her way of thinking about translation and her translations still matter today: they not only question assumptions about what feminist translation might be, but also assumptions about women translators.

## 6. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Karin Tillberg (Uppsala University), as well as the two anonymous reviewers, for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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